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New firm to design Westcourt

By KATHRYNE TOVO
Staff Writer

After a nine-month search, a new development firm has been chosen for the Westcourt project.

Antoine Puech, a partner in the project, said the new development firm Davidson and Jones of Raleigh has drawn a new design for Westcourt.

The specifics of the design are being kept confidential, but Puech said the new plan is significantly different from the original.

Chapel Hill Town Council member David Godschalk said the new plan will need to be submitted to the planning board and to the council before any construction can begin.

The project was given an extension by the town council in November. Several council members expressed their dissatisfaction with the design of the project at that meeting.

Julie Andresen, a council member who voted against the original proposal and the application for the extension, said she was very eager to see the new plan for the project.

"Although the addition of retail business and residential units are desirable, the building is unattractive," she said in November.

Andresen said she hopes the new design will have some retail businesses on the ground level and will handle the parking situation realistically.

The project has encountered several setbacks since it was approved a few years ago.

In October 1988, a major financial backer of the project was imprisoned for embezzlement. Guilford Waddell, a UNC graduate and Chapel Hill businessman, was given a 12-year prison sentence for embezzling \$2 million from his clients.

Waddell was replaced by Antoine Puech and Jack Behrman, who were named general partners of the limited partnership that controls Westcourt.

Puech said attorney Kenneth Broun is now negotiating a settlement with the bankruptcy trustee to identify what financial interests Waddell has remaining in the project.

"We (the partnership) feel Waddell has been more than compensated by the development, and perhaps he has no more interests," Puech said. "However, this is a matter for negotiation."

The project was granted an extension by the Chapel Hill Town Council in November.

The approved application would have created residences, offices and retail stores on Rosemary Street and at the intersection of West Franklin and Church streets across from University Square.

Road Plan

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traffic capacity into and out of Chapel Hill, to eliminate traffic congestion and to provide increased access to North Carolina Memorial Hospital.

"People tend to think that if you widen a road it will be more congested because of an increase in traffic, but really the widening will make the road less congested, because cars will be able to travel more quickly," Webb said.

Another reason for the expansion of the road is increasing bicycle and pedestrian safety, he said.

"Sight distance along South Columbia is not good at all, and when you have bicyclists and pedestrians using a street, safety should be a primary concern," Webb said.

The DOT proposals include flattening the curve along South Columbia Street between Chase Avenue and Mason Farm Road. Flattening the curve will improve sight distance, he said.

Several Chapel Hill residents attended the meeting and voiced concerns on a variety of issues, including the future of Merritt's Store, the preservation of the existing stone walls along South Columbia Street, and the destruction of homes and property to make way for the expansion.

DOT representatives at the meeting worked to assure concerned citizens that all aspects of the project would be investigated before the projected 1992 construction date.

William Frey, a commuting bicyclist and an employee at North Carolina Memorial Hospital, said his concerns were with the future of bike lanes along the street and traffic at the intersection of South Columbia and Pittsboro streets.

"The traffic at South Columbia and Pittsboro is very dangerous, and I'm concerned the increased flow of traffic through the intersection will make matters worse," Frey said.

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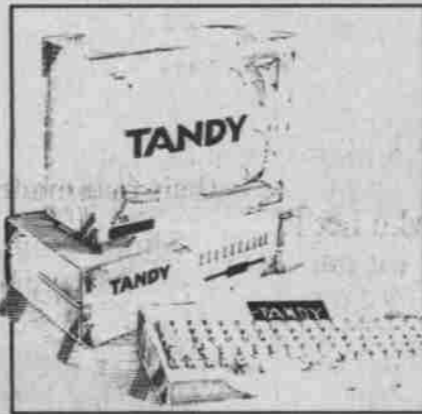
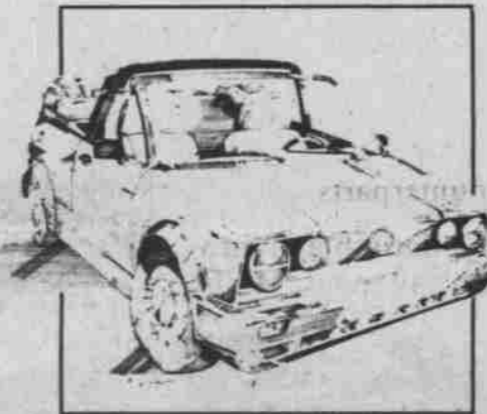
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